

II. Learning and Preparation for Bar or Bat Mitzvah

What does my child have to know to celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

The Rabbi will review general expectations with you at the Family B'nei Mitzvah Seminars. Typically, students should be familiar with Shabbat services, able to read Hebrew from the siddur as well as from the Torah and/or Haftarah, able to chant the brachot for an Aliyah, and able to lead the Friday night kiddush.

What if my child has learning differences?

The Rabbi, in consultation with parents, will develop appropriate goals for children with learning differences.

How will my child learn Torah trope?

B'nei Mitzvah who read Torah need to demonstrate their preparation for this honor. They need to be able to read, chant and know the trope, which is the musical notation used to chant from the Torah. Day School students will begin learning trope in the years leading up to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Navasky students begin learning Torah trope in 6th Grade. The B'nei Mitzvah tutors will reinforce what your child has learned and teach more as needed.

When does my child begin working with a tutor?

Individual tutoring generally begins approximately 6 months before the simcha. It consists of weekly 45-minute sessions. You and the tutor will arrange for the day and time of the tutoring. Tutoring generally takes place at Beth El.

The Rabbi will assign an individual tutor to your child. The Beth El tutors are experienced and dedicated, and are an integral part of the B'nei Mitzvah process.

What does the tutor do?

The tutor will provide your child with materials such as the Haftarah, Maftir reading, the brachot, and a recording (e.g., an mp3 file) that your child can use for home practice. The tutor will work with your child to help them first learn the Haftarah and its brachot, and the brachot for an aliyah. After that is mastered, the tutor will help your child apply his or her knowledge of Torah trope to reading some of the week's Torah portion, beginning with the Maftir reading. The tutor will help your child practice leading the Torah service.

The tutoring will only be effective if daily practice is part of the program. In addition to the time spent with the tutor, you and your child should plan to set aside 15 minutes **EACH** day for practice.

The cost of this standard amount of tutoring is included in your B'nei Mitzvah fee, billed in installments between the moment you confirm a Bar or Bat Mitzvah date (as early as three years in advance) and the Simcha itself. The tutor is paid by the synagogue. *If you are interested in having your tutor begin early and/or teach a number of additional sessions, you must reach a private agreement with them to*

pay them directly for their extra time. For more information, see the section on Financial Policies in Part VI.

Can my child lead more than the Torah service?

Bar/Bat Mitzvah students are welcome and encouraged to learn to lead the Musaf (concluding) service once they can demonstrate mastery over Haftarah trope and have learned most of the Haftarah. Regular attendance on Shabbat mornings will provide students many opportunities to become comfortable with several parts of Musaf. Students who will study Musaf will meet regularly with Rabbi Paskind in addition to their tutoring.

Friday night services are normally led in part by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. As most of the educational effort is placed on the Saturday morning portion of the Shabbat services, confirming which parts of the Friday night service will be led by the child often happens toward the end of the preparation process. Some students may participate in the Friday night service by leading the Kiddush, while others may take on the full Maariv service.

What is the D'var Torah?

The Bar or Bat Mitzvah prepares a D'var Torah, or teaching (literally, "a word of Torah"), approximately 4 – 7 minutes in length. S/he will present the D'var Torah to the congregation following the Torah reading and before the Haftarah. This provides the child with an opportunity for leadership through teaching the congregation. The child will add his/her insights based upon Jewish tradition.

The skill of writing a D'var Torah will be addressed during the B'nei Mitzvah seminars. Please encourage the Bar or Bat Mitzvah to speak slowly and clearly. Congregants look forward to hearing the words and thoughts offered by the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. This learning and teaching experience adds to the meaning and spirituality of the experience.

Why is the 6th Grade Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program Important?

The 6th Grade Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program provides the student with a greater level of familiarity and comfort with different parts of the Shabbat service. This program is overseen by our Director of Education in consultation with the Rabbi.

Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah meets one Shabbat morning per month. 6th graders sit with our Director of Education in the Sanctuary where he assists them in following the service and answers questions relating to the prayers and their meaning. During much of the Torah reading and Rabbi's D'var Torah, the class meets with the Director for a light snack and short socializing along with learning/practice sessions relating to the Torah Service. Students return with the Director for the Musaf Service.

In addition to the 6th Grade Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program, attendance at the 6th Grade Family Shabbat Services and the annual Shul-In and Shabbaton are critical in attaining the requisite skills and comfort level to lead Shabbat morning services. All students, regardless of the school they attend, are expected to attend as many of these sessions as possible.

What are the Family B'nei Mitzvah Seminars?

The Rabbi leads a series of four seminars for groups of B'nei Mitzvah children and their parents. These required seminars provide both excellent guidance on the major aspects of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah as well as providing an opportunity for you and your child to meet with the Rabbi and raise general questions. BOTH parents are STRONGLY encouraged to join their children at the Family Seminars. These seminars are organized according to the date of your simcha and meet on Sunday afternoons. With the Rabbi, you and your child will explore the possibilities for Tzedakah, Gemilut Chasadim, and Torah study in the context of Jewish adulthood and its privileges and responsibilities. The Rabbi will also provide guidance and resources for preparation of the D'var Torah, as well as in-depth instruction in putting on a tallit and tefillin. Finally, one session will focus upon the sacred logistics of the morning.

Can parents learn along with their children?

Absolutely! There is no better example that you can set for your children than to demonstrate your commitment to life-long Jewish learning. For adults who want to engage with Jewish study, Beth El offers a variety of classes. Please check with the synagogue office to learn what classes are currently offered or planned.

Beth El's Adult Education committee occasionally offers a Torah trope class for adults, which is a wonderful opportunity for upcoming B'nei Mitzvah parents to learn a new skill and then participate at their child's Simcha.

Where can I find more information about the parashah or Haftarah?

The Jewish Theological Seminary, <http://www.jtsa.edu/jts-torah-online>

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, <http://www.uscj.org>

My Jewish Learning, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com>

Union for Reform Judaism, <http://www.urj.org/torah>

Hillel, <http://www.hillel.org>

BimBam (formerly G-dcast), <http://www.bimbam.com/torah-texts/>

The Bible Players, <http://www.thebibleplayers.com/>